1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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Chapter 4

Early Childhood: From Walking to Wearing a Loincloth

THIS period covers the time from the first walking to about the age of [256]
five or six, when children are referred to as "young" (*fila*). It may well be the period of greatest stress for the Atimelang child.

WALKING

When a child begins to walk about with some show of steadiness, it is no longer carried so constantly in a shawl, although the break is obviously not sharp and complete. Padafan, for example, began toddling at about sixteen months, and from then on, most of his day was spent out of the shawl. However, when he was taken any distance, he was still carried in the infantile fashion. At first, too, when his mother returned from the fields in the evening she would put him in her shawl to nurse him. By the time he was approximately twenty-six months old he was rarely placed in a carrying shawl any more, although he might still be picked up and held in an adult's arms when he strenuously insisted upon it.

The carrying shawl, however, remains throughout life a way of [482]
transporting sick or injured persons. The devotion of a parent who carries a sick half-grown child any distance, or of an adult who carries an aged and incapacitated parent in this fashion, is referred to with approval. Naturally, when a heavy person is carried, some adjustment to the load must be made. In such a case the person often sits pickaback, and the shawl is passed under his buttocks and across the chest or forehead of the carrier in tumpline fashion. In any case, the carrying shawl is associated with helplessness and infancy and is normally discarded [355]
between the second and third year of life. Therefore, after learning to walk, the child loses many of the constant skin contacts and much of the support it previously received.

FEEDING

At this time the child is turned out to play near the house or on the [355]
dance place for the whole day under the casual supervision of an older [866]
child or an aged adult. The most drastic repercussion of this additional freedom is an increase in the unsatisfactory aspects of feeding. When the mother goes off to work, the child is left from about eight in the

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855 morning until about five in the afternoon without regular provision for
866 food. This does not mean that it is left entirely without food; but all it gets are the odd bits older children cede, more or less generously, when it begs or screams for them.

Again of course there are marked variations in children's experiences in this respect. There may be a solicitous older sister who can be spared from field work and who provides relatively good care, or there may be a grandmother who works less hard and frequently in the gardens. In any case, after a child has learned to walk, its disappointments with respect to feeding are increased, and simultaneously it loses the constant handling and support characteristic of the first stage of its life. That the acquisition of its first skill in the independent mastery of the outer
[153] world—namely, walking—should be associated with severe deprivation may well have marked repercussions in the realm of ego development.

862 To add to the strain of this period and to reinforce it, the weaning of the child may be hastened because another sibling is expected. Only rarely does one see a child of three or four still nursing, and when one does, it can be assumed that it is because no younger child has been born into the family. It is an exception for a mother to permit an older child to take the breast when she has a younger one to nurse. Weaning is done gradually and simply by pushing the child gently away from the breast. If the child is insistent it will perhaps be slapped. Should it still insist, it may be sent to live in the household of a kin, and "he forgets in two or three nights." It is considered desirable to have weaning completed at least a month before the next child is born. If another pregnancy does not occur, it is assumed that children gradually wean themselves. "They think of other foods and forget the breast."

842 In connection with weaning, a mother sometimes uses a mild form
865 of adult teasing, nursing a strange infant to arouse jealousy in her own growing child. For example, Padafan had almost entirely given up the breast when one day he saw his mother nursing the child of a kinswoman. He began to whimper and tried to climb up on her lap. Not until he had worked himself into a rage and had begun striking the infant, did the mother smilingly surrender the strange child and pick up Padafan to let him nurse. The adults are fully aware of infantile jealousy and they derive a mild amusement from it. Despite this, custom makes weaning as easy as possible for the child, and if it were not for its frequent association with the appearance of another sibling and for the cumulative effects of various other factors operating at this period, the weaning situation might well be considered nontraumatic. Food,

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155 The inconsistent and restrictive quality of discipline which pervades the child's life
152 might well be expected to breed in it a sense of insecurity and suspicious distrust. It has at
865 its disposal only one weapon with which to meet frustration and that is rage. The alternative idea of being good in order to gain one's ends is not presented to the child. But that rage is an ineffectual weapon is learned at very latest during the first decade of life.

155 While the child is discovering the futility of protest, he is also discovering his own re-
868 sources. He may expect his mother to prepare a morning meal at about seven o'clock and an-
866 other at about the same time in the evening. During the intervening twelve hours he learns to forage for himself. He learns this from five or six onward in the fluid play groups of free
247 roving children. Remnants may be scraped from the cooking pot. A variety of insects usually spurned by adults can be found. In the fields near the village are mangoes, bananas, sweet potatoes, young corn, and squash. They can be eaten raw or easily cooked. As a rule adults do not object to the minor depredations of their own children or their playmates, but if the raiding is too constant or if the crop is scarce, children may be scolded for it. Such objections are most apt to be voiced when children are reaching the age at which their labor might be expected and is not forthcoming. There are several anecdotes of reproaches on this score, and in one instance a mother and half-grown son came to blows over the matter. But an additional factor in adult objections to children using garden crops too freely is that it
155 may actually disrupt friendships between age-mates. Mangma, in his autobiography, gives
578 several such anecdotes, one of which is quoted below.

866 Manimale said, "Let us go to the fields to dig sweet potatoes." My mother and father were
855 away and I was hungry. For a month we played together going every day to dig sweet potatoes. But his mother was angry because we went to her garden to dig them. So after that first day we always went to my garden to dig them. Then my potatoes were finished. I was angry because we always went to my garden. I said to him, "You have lots of potatoes but we only went once to your garden and your mother was angry. Now you have many and you can't come to dig mine any more." I splashed water on him. Manimale said we would not play together any more.

Parental objections also pave the way for the thieving in which play groups of boys frequently indulge. The whole system of feeding reinforces one of the marked intracultural tensions centering on theft and fear of theft.

155 During this preadolescent play period boys may get occasional meals as guests. When an
574 adult man visits a house in which a woman is at home, it is customary to set a calabash of
857 food before him and any little boys who are about are invited to join him. Little boys very
855 soon learn to attach themselves to any man who seems to be setting out on a "business" trip and in this way undoubtedly learn a great deal of the role expected of them as adults. Hunger is a motivation which leads to the acquisition of adult male skills. Little girls are not fed on these occasions, except rarely when they pick up a bit of food on the side while it is being prepared. There are still other sources of food available to small boys. During feasts those who help with the butchering are given the entrails or other less desirable bits of the pig to roast on the spot. Rat hunting, in which several boys assist a grown man or two, is another